

## **Families on the Move: A Little Physical Activity Goes a Long Way**

It doesn't take a lot of physical activity to make a difference and any activity is better than no activity. The traditional view of physical activity as a scheduled exercise period is not the only way to look at activity. In fact, the idea of "exercising" may actually turn some people off, so the emphasis should be that everyday activities can be beneficial to health as well. This approach may encourage more people to feel like they can reap the health benefits of an active lifestyle. Physical activity is particularly important today because the percentage of the population that is overweight or obese continues to climb and physical activity is one way to stop or reverse this trend.

While most of us know physical activity is good for us, there can be many factors that work against us in starting and maintaining a physically active lifestyle. What's working against people being more active?

- We have less leisure time, so fitting in physical activity is more challenging.
- We drive to most locations. In fact, recent surveys indicate that for trips under a half-mile, 57 percent of us drive.
- Recent housing development, particularly in suburbs, has created neighborhoods that are not laid out to encourage walking or biking.
- In most cases children are now bused to school, so the number of children who walk to school has decreased dramatically in the past 20 years.
- Some scheduled activities, such as formal physical education time in schools, are less available than in the past.

Collectively these changes have resulted in dramatic changes, including a Wisconsin population where 60% of all adults are considered overweight or obese. Add to lower activity levels the fact that people are busy and therefore are more likely to eat high calorie foods and it's easy to see why the percent of the population that is overweight or obese is increasing. In fact, it is estimated that 21% of Wisconsin adults are obese, a percentage that has nearly doubled in the past 10 years.

What can you do to be more active?

- Any physical activity is better than none. You don't need to get your daily activity at one time; you can have several shorter periods of activity that add up to 30 minutes or more per day.
- Work activity into your daily routine. When possible walk or bike on short trips, use the stairs instead of an elevator.
- Involve others for social interaction and 'peer pressure' to stay involved. People are more likely to stay with physical activity programs that involve interaction with others.
- Set your goals in writing and make them easy to measure so you can see how you're doing (e.g., steps per day or times per week. Formal goal setting sets a target that is harder to ignore, unlike unspoken or unwritten goals.
- Monitor or track your progress. People who monitor their progress toward well-defined goals are more likely to achieve their goals and stick with their activity program.
- Set up incentives for yourself, for when you meet your goal. Maybe you need a new pair of walking shorts or want to see a particular movie.

So how much is enough? The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American College of Sports Medicine have agreed on the following guidelines. At a minimum, adults are advised:

- Be active at least 30 minutes/day (at least 60 minutes for kids)
- Be active at least 5 days/week
- Everyday activities count

Remember that physical activity includes everyday activities such as yard work (raking leaves, digging holes, or hauling brush) or housework (scrubbing on hands and knees, carrying grocery bags, or washing windows). The minimum recommendations for activity will help maintain a healthy lifestyle. Additional activity will help improve fitness levels and control body weight.